



Report on Anti-Oppression staff training  
AFS Consultancy Grant

Report by Selina Morales with Jenna Peters Golden

## **Introduction**

In 2014, the Philadelphia Folklore Project completed a 4-year-long leadership transition. After 27 years at the helm, the Founding Director stepped down and the organization welcomed the next Director and two new senior staff members. Currently, staff includes two long-time PFP staffers (10 years and 4 years) and two new-to-PFP senior staff members. The transition was a landmark moment for the organization. The moment was full of important questions about PFP's identity, community, sustainability, mission, and vision.

Over this first year, the new staff worked together on best understanding and relating to the mission of the organization and on a shared vision for PFP and for the city of Philadelphia. Supported by a grant from the American Folklore Society, the Philadelphia Folklore Project worked with Jenna Peters Golden, Anti-Oppression Resource Training Alliance (<http://aorta.coop>), on planning and teambuilding.

## **Anti-Oppression**

Because work at the Philadelphia Folklore Project (PFP) is often in collaboration with communities who are directly impacted by systems of oppression, staff aimed to learn direct ways to model anti-oppressive processes at PFP and to brainstorm ways of dismantling systemic harm. Work with our consultant, Jenna Peters-Golden helped build out a tool kit for work at PFP. Staff asked the following questions:

What systems of oppression exist within our organization, and how do we and can we dismantle these systems and grow our collaborative practice?

What ways do we already model our programs to build power and agency with our community collaborators? How can we advance these conscious efforts?

## **The Work**

Jenna Peters Golden worked with the staff over two retreat days to:

DAY 1: Advance the staff's ability to work as a team

DAY 2: Build staff's relationships to the organization's mission  
& Articulate a collective vision for the work

## DAY 1:

### **POINTS OF UNITY: Advancing the staff's ability to work as a team**

Through a series of visioning exercises, staff created Points of Unity: A document to help guide the work of building the next generation of PFP.

From AORTA:

#### Beyond a Vision & Purpose: Points of Unity

The process of crafting Points of Unity provides an opportunity for an organization to launch in depth conversations about their values and approaches.

**Points of Unity are your shared goals, beliefs, methods and means.**

When taken seriously and crafted carefully, they can be a valuable document to guide your work. If your Points of Unity solidly reflect who you are and what you believe in, it can be something you refer to when deciding on which projects to take on, what services to provide, how to hire new workers, how to conduct meetings/ decision making and so on.

Below are some Sample Points of Unity, to give you an indication of what they can look like for various organizations.

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Take a look at Allied Media Projects “Network Principles.” They are a great example of how to creatively, yet thoroughly articulate values and ethics that will realistically inform organizational decisions and actions:

<https://www.alliedmedia.org/about/network-principles>

Here are some of AORTA's Points of Unity. You can see that we were **influenced and inspired by AMP**, but figured out a very different voice and reflect our own project, processes, and values:

- We recognize that our process is political. We strive to enact and model our principles and vision through our process.
- We recognize there are many forms of privilege and oppression, and that they intersect. We embrace the interconnectedness of our liberation. We believe all topics need to be addressed from an intersectional lens. This is always a part of what we offer.
- We value resource sharing amongst other anti oppression organizers.
- We contribute to a just political network by directly linking resources and services with the communities that need them.
- We understand intergenerational work to be a key part of movement building. We nurture intergenerational practices that bring together children, youth, adults and peers.
- We will be forgiving of each other and create space for honest, deep engagement

- and healthy communication, both within AORTA and within broader movements.
- We value intimacy, depth, and trust in our work together and intentionally keep AORTA small in order to support this.
  - The work is not the workshop. Training is one piece of a broader movement building process that requires many different types of work from community organizing to direct action to art creation and beyond.
  - Our work is movement building. We are intentionally and strategically building alliances, relationships and networks between varied organizations within our movement. This involves constant work at the individual, organizational, and structural level.
  - We believe care for self, others, and community is crucial to sustainable organizing.
  - We will make extraordinary efforts to support mental, emotional, and physical health and well being. We support each other in creating realistic work loads and stepping back as needed in order to sustain long term organizing.
  - We stand in alliance with struggles that uphold collective liberation and cooperation. These struggles are grounded in racial, gender, economic, environmental, and disability justice; trans and queer liberations; anti capitalist and anti imperialist politics.
  - We believe that individuals and organizations can be transformed. Significant change comes slowly and requires work. The changes that happen quickly are often superficial or temporary. Deep changes come after resistance, denial, and pain have all been worked through.
  - We work with groups that are both targets and agents of oppression while recognizing that we all hold multiple identities and positions within interlocking systems of oppression and privilege.
  - We recognize that uprooting and understanding systems of oppression is a continual process. Therefore, we maintain a commitment to constantly challenging and building our social justice and political analysis.
  - Core skills in organizational operations, development, and growth are an important part of our training menu, alongside analysis and political education. We incorporate an anti oppression analysis into all the workshops that we offer.
  - We prioritize longer workshops over shorter workshops because we want to allow for depth of analysis, strategies, and relationship building.
  - We assume our own power, and maintain our humility. We honor our elders, political ancestors, and contemporaries.
  - We believe in the importance of leadership development to support long term efforts. We need as many leaders as possible. We prioritize the development of leadership among youth; communities directly impacted by injustice, and historically oppressed communities.

And finally, these are the Points of Unity from the **Design Action Collective**, a collective that does web design for social justice organizations:

<http://designaction.org/about/points-of-unity/>



## POINTS OF UNITY

### DRAFT\*

Philadelphia Folklore Project staff 2015

- We recognize peoples' multiple and intersecting identities.
- Due to over and covert systemic oppression, many cultures and ethnicities are not valued or respected. This is not ok with us.
- Opportunities to practice valued cultural traditions and knowledge enhances lives, self determination, and community vitality.
- Because of economic injustice and disparity there is a real need to fund artists who are systematically denied access to resources and support.
- Care for people, relationships, and artistic connections nourish us.
- We have a commitment to change the landscape of education in Philadelphia (and beyond), within realms of "formal" and "non-formal" education. We aim to ensure that local knowledge and culture is centered and valued in schools.
- Opportunities to collaborate artistically enrich our cultural lives and work. We value a never-ending expansion of personal and community growth and knowledge.
- We strive to be in alliance with communities to value important aspects of their heritages.
- We see sharing aspects of cultural knowledge as only one strategy of our work, and we determine if that strategy is the best one by staying in line with all our other values, especially valuing self-determination and clear communication.
- We see our work as playing a role in building a world without violence.
- We see the inclusion of traditional arts as being vital to building peaceful, nourishing, and healthy lives and communities.
- We are working towards a world that has effectively advocated for and ensured equity among traditional art forms and cultural knowledge.
- We are working towards a world in which folk and traditional artists and practitioners can practice their arts and be valued for it (monetarily and socially).

\*These Points of Unity are a first draft and should not be replicated in any form without consultation with the Philadelphia Folklore Project, [pfp@folkloreproject.org](mailto:pfp@folkloreproject.org). They are shared here with permission.

## DAY 2:

### **PROGRAM AUDIT: Building staff's relationships to the organization's mission & articulating a collective vision for the work**

A facilitated, conversational tour through PFP's core programs gave the staff a chance to examine the work with a critical lens. Veteran staff delivered the "back story" about how programs evolved and what keeps them going. New staff's questions probed at mission, vision and challenged the status quo. This exercise resulted in building consensus on the organizations most important/core programs and then assessing each program for its relationship to the mission and then visioning where the program can grow and develop. Within this activity, staff discussed 6 of 9 identified core programs.

Activity:

1. LIST PROGRAM AREAS
2. ASSESSMENTS

Four questions of each program area:

1. **WHAT** is the program? What is it providing and accomplishing?
2. **WHO** does it serve? Who does it impact?
3. **WHY** does it advance PFP's mission?
4. **HOW** much of PFP's resources does it take? Time, money, staff, energy, passion...

Here is an example of notes from PFP's assessment of a core program:

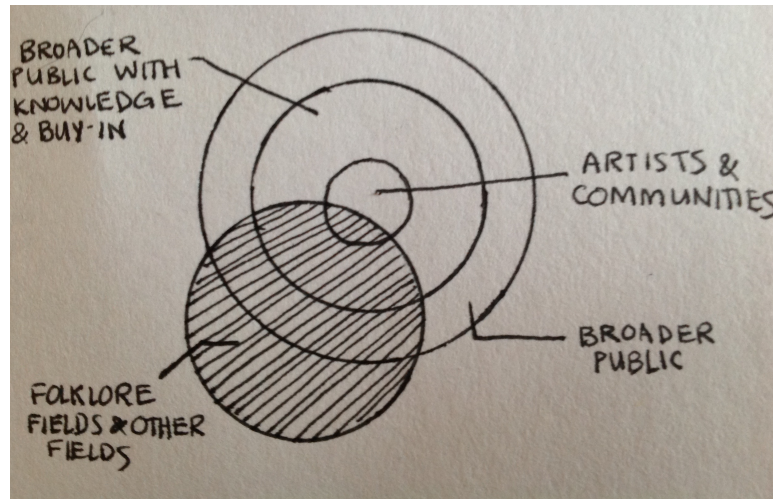
#### FOLK ARTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE RESIDENCIES

*WHAT is the program?: A collaborative program that works with communities, individual artists who work on a project that advances social change. Relationships with artists/communities can last for a range of time. There is usually some sort of outcome: an exhibit, an article, or documentation of the project. This program is reliant on being flexible.*

*WHAT it accomplishes and provides:*

- ♥ *Relationships (deepening already existing ones and building new ones)*
- ♥ *Fuels ethnographic processes and practices. Allows for internal experimentation.*
- ♥ *Creates new and refined models of processes and practices that are then available to disperse, share with a larger community.*
- ♥ *Provides money for artists (as well as other resources that allow artists to subsist)*
- ♥ *Platform to share culture and histories within communities and beyond*

*WHO it serves: communities, organizations, individual artists by building skills, capacities, and knowledge.*



*WHY: This program hits the most goals of PFP's strategic plan because it is so multifaceted. It also allows PFP's mission to play out in multiple fields.*

*HOW: Because this program is inherently flexible and changing, the resources it takes from PFP changes depending on the community/artists skills, time, and resources. From PFP it utilizes methodology, technical skills, logistical organization, exhibition and set up/performance, time for the process to unfold. It is estimated that FASCR takes about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of PFP's annual budget.*

### **Next Steps**

Selina and Jenna concluded the planning sessions by recording a conversation about connections between public interest folklore methodology and anti-oppression training tools. This exciting debrief will fuel next steps between AORTA Collective and the Philadelphia Folklore Project. Jenna is considering how community-based folk and traditional arts can be used as resources for building social change movements because of her interactions with PFP programs and staff. Selina and PFP staff are working on recognizing anti-oppressive ways of facilitating meetings, planning projects, thinking about budgets, understanding organizational structures and hierarchies, and communicating with collaborators. In 2015, the two teams will meet again to continue strategic planning work with PFP's Board of Directors. Selina and Jenna's 2015 debrief conversation will be transcribed and shared in a white paper in 2015.